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CULTS, PLACES, ANATOMICALS. SO-CALLED HEALING SANCTUARIES REVISITED. NEW INSIGHT ON TRADITIONS, INTERRELATIONS AND ALIGNMENTS

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After tackling the question which cult sites we do consider as healing cults – i.e. which kind of topography, architecture, written sources, venerated deities and specific finds provide the basis to assume a sanctuary was specialised in healing – the presentation will focus on the phenomenon of anatomical votives in sanctuaries of Latium (Italy) dedicated in the 4th to 1st cent. BC. These votives were hitherto understood as indicators for so-called healing cults. The archaeological and historical contexts though, e.g. the associated finds as well as the topographic position of the sites and their traditions, have hardly been focused yet. Featuring a holistic and contextualising approach the lecture will present the analysis of more than 100 sites in Latium with a total of over 15.000 anatomical votives regarding their connection to environmental parameters as springs, lakes, mountain tops, caves and connections to roads and settlements. Quantitative and gender-specific analyses are also taken into account. Based on this data the so-called healing cults of Latium can be divided into two main groups which differ from their location, the composition of the dedicated votives, the venerated deities and probably the dedicants.

These two groups presumably root in local cult traditions and were spread by entangled communities with shared or similar religious conceptions. Given that, anatomical votives can be understood as part of an indigenous identity within a broader network of cultural exchange. Very likely the anatomical votives should not be seen as objects with a prescribed meaning in a static cultic frame but as multivalent offerings in a dynamic frame of reference.

Contributing this new insight on tradition, interrelation and alignment may broaden the session's perspective on healing cults and add a significant benefit to the discussion.

Keywords

Healing Cults, Sacred Landscapes, Cult practices, Votive offerings

Note/comment